

No Smooth Words

An Introduction and Reading of Ezekiel 12-18

Ezekiel 12:1 The word of the Lord came to me:

² “Son of man, you dwell in the midst of a rebellious house, who have eyes to see, but see not, who have ears to hear, but hear not, for they are a rebellious house.

(Ezekiel 12:1-2)

Selective Reading

IMAGINE YOU ARE in a formal religious setting where people not only need to be comforted with good news, but some need to be convicted of their own sin and see the righteousness of a holy God so that they might turn from their own evil ways and be healed. Without the bad news, the good news is meaningless. It could be an evangelistic crusade, a funeral, or even a church service. Someone hands a photocopied text of the biblical passage for the event to the reader, and as they look over it, they begin to highlight certain things in it that they don't find particularly “helpful” for the occasion. They unilaterally decide, with no discussion or debate, to only give a *partial* reading—simply skipping over all

the parts that talk about God's anger and wrath, our iniquities and secret sins, and the need to fear God.

Later on, as someone who didn't have their Bible with them to read along, **you notice out loud to a friend** that the reading felt like it was shorter than it should have been and that something just felt "off." The reader overhears your conversation and proudly hands you the copy of the text that they had read with all their markings crossing out all of that nasty "wrath" and "judgment" stuff, because it wasn't "appropriate." Sadly, this is the way many Christians today treat their Bible and the God who inspired it. Importantly, **there is nothing new under the sun**.

In the days of Isaiah and Micah, prior to the Northern Kingdom of Israel being taken into captivity, we read of people saying "to the seers, 'Do not see,' and to the prophets, 'Do not prophesy to us what is right; speak to us smooth things, prophesy illusions'" (**Isa 30:10**). "If a man should go about and utter wind and lies, saying, 'I will preach to you of wine and strong drink,' he would be the preacher for this people!" (**Micah 2:11**). Because they refused to hear God's words of judgment against sin and repent, the LORD brought the sins of the Northern Kingdom down upon their own heads as the brutal **Assyrian** army ransacked the north,

massacring without mercy and bringing whoever remained into captivity in a faraway land.

Sadly, the **people of Judah** did not learn the lesson and so we read prophets like Jeremiah and Ezekiel saying things such as, “**They say continually to those who despise the word of the Lord, ‘It shall be well with you’; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, ‘No disaster shall come upon you’**” (**Jer 23:17**) or “**The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule at their direction; my people love to have it so, but what will you do when the end comes?**” (**Jer 5:31**). Even in our reading today we find the prophet saying, “**Son of man, you dwell in the midst of a rebellious house, who have eyes to see, but see not, who have ears to hear, but hear not, for they are a rebellious house**” (**Ezek 12:2**) and “**Because they have led my people astray, saying, ‘Peace,’ when there is no peace, and because, when the people build a wall, these prophets smear it with whitewash**” (**Ezek 13:10**).

But of course, this is the way it probably is with every generation, for who truly wants in their flesh to be confronted with, as the words of the famous sermon by Jonathan Edwards puts it, “**Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God?**” Paul, speaking to both Timothy’s era and our own

warned, “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions” (2Tim 4:3).

Ezekiel 12-23, an Introduction

Today we continue making our way into the next—the **second—main section** of Ezekiel’s amazing prophecy. I’ve been working off a book-length chiasm as our outline.

- A. Yahweh Comes to His Temple (Ezek 1-11)
- B. Oracles of Judgment (12-23)**
- C. Jerusalem Besieged (24)
- D. Oracles Against the Foreign Nations (25:1-28:10)
- E. Judgment on the Fallen Cherub (28:11-19)
- D’. Oracles Against the Foreign Nations (29-32)
- C’. Jerusalem Falls (33)
- B’. Oracles of Restoration (34-39)
- A’. Yahweh Comes to His Temple (40-48)¹

In this structure, we find that the second main section of the book is a series of **oracles** against Israel, and Jerusalem in

¹ Summary of Jiří Moskala, “[Notes on the Literary Structure of the Book of Ezekiel](#),” *Andrews University* (2016): 102-110.

particular. These go from chs. 12-23. They are **directly paralleled** with oracles that take place in chs. 24-39. As we have become accustomed to doing, we are going to read a large portion of the text together today. However, there is simply too much material here for me to be able to get through all of this in a reasonable time this morning. Therefore, I have decided that I'm going to read chs. 12-18 today and then chs. 19-24 next time.² But before reading it, I want us to get familiar with the material and what we are going to hear.

As my short introduction was supposed to hint at, we enter a sobering section of God's Word (I know, as if the last eleven chapters weren't sobering enough!) where the prophet delivers oracles of judgment against Judah with a vividness that demands our attention. The selective hearing of God's word in the introduction **mirrors Judah's refusal** to face the "bad news" Ezekiel proclaims: their sin and coming exile. Delivered around 593 BC to exiles in Babylon, these chapters use *symbolic acts*, *oracles*, *allegories*, and *parables* to confront a "**rebellious house**" (12:2) who have "**eyes to see, but see not, ears to hear, but hear not**" (12:2).

² I will add ch. 24 to the next reading, because as the "C" unit of the chiasm, it stands alone as its own chapter. But in a way, it is really the culmination of these twelve chapters, and in another sense of the first 23 chapters of Ezekiel as it is the impending judgment that is now about to fall on Jerusalem.

Ch.	Symbolic Acts	Oracles	Allegories	Parables
12	Vv 3-7, 17-20	21-28		
13		1-16; 17-23		
14		1-11; 12-20; 21-23		
15			1-8	
16			1-63	
17				1-24
18	1-29, 30-32			
19			1-14	
20		1-32; 33-44; 45-49		
21		1-17; 19-32	8-17	
22		1-22; 23-31		
23				1-49

Let's look at these four genres or forms of communicating a little more closely.

Symbolic Acts: **Symbolic acts** are things we've seen before. They involve **Ezekiel physically enacting God's message** to vividly portray Judah's judgment, making him a "sign" to the people (**12:6**). In Chapter 12, he **packs a bag and digs through a wall (12:3–7)** to symbolize exile, reinforcing that the people will through this act "**know that I am the Lord**" (**12:15**). These acts grab attention, bypassing the people's refusal to hear "**bad news**" (**12:2**), setting a dramatic tone for the oracles of judgment.

Oracles: **Oracles are direct prophetic pronouncements from God**, delivering judgment with clarity and authority,

often in the form of a covenant lawsuit. In Chapters 13–14 and 22, Ezekiel condemns false prophets for “**lying divination**” (13:6) and Judah for “**idols in their heart**” (14:3; 22:3), confronting spiritual corruption. These oracles expose Judah’s sin and resistance to hard truths (13:10), urging accountability in the chiasm’s structure.

Allegories: **Allegories** use extended metaphors to depict Judah’s covenant unfaithfulness, portraying sin through vivid imagery. Chapters 15 (Jerusalem as a useless **vine**, “like a vine,” 15:2) and 16 (adulterous bride, “**played the whore**,” 16:15) illustrate betrayal. These allegories highlight Judah’s refusal to face judgment, preferring false assurances (12:2).

Parables: **Parables** are not a form of storytelling that Jesus made up. They have been around forever. Ezekiel employs them to convey judgment and rebellion, engaging listeners with **symbolic stories**. In Chapter 17, the parable of two eagles and a vine (“**rebelled against him**,” 17:15) depicts Judah’s covenant-breaking alliances, mirrored by Chapter 19’s lament (“rebelled against me,” 19:2, implied). These parables underscore Judah’s rebellion, challenging their “ears tickled” avoidance of God’s warnings (13:10).

Chs. 12-23 and on through 24 are **chiastic**, meaning that they bend back in on themselves. They begin and end with

how we know that God is alone the LORD as they center on the place we will end our reading today: turning from sin and repenting that you may not die. This makes the ending of our reading an appropriate place to stop and a wonderful look at the nature of God as it regards even the severe judgment that was now coming down upon the people for breaking covenant.

- A. “Know That I Am the Lord” (12:15) Symbolic Acts of Exile (12:1–28)
- B. “Lying Divination” (13:6) False Prophecy Condemned (13:1–23)
- C. “Idols in Their Heart” (14:3) Idolatry Indicted (14:1–23)
- D. “Like a Vine” (15:2) Unfaithfulness Allegorized (15:1–8)
- E. “Played the Whore” (16:15) Adultery Allegorized (16:1–63)
- F. “Rebelled Against Him” (17:15) Rebellion Parabled (17:1–24)
- G. “Turn and Live” (18:32) Repentance Urged (18:1–32)**
- F'. “Rebelled Against Me” (19:2) Leadership Lamented (19:1–14)
- E'. “Played the Whore” (23:5) Adultery Allegorized (23:1–49)
- D'. “Like a Vine” (21:10) Judgment Imaged (20:45–21:32)
- C'. “Made Your Idols” (22:3) Sins Indicted (22:1–31)
- B'. “Lying Divination” (22:28) False Prophecy Judged (22:23–31)
- A'. “Know That I Am the Lord” (24:27) Symbolic Acts of Judgment (24:1–27)

Though delivered to the exiles in Babylon, Ezekiel’s message targets Jerusalem—its leaders, prophets, and people—who cling to false assurances rather than face their covenant unfaithfulness. In Chapter 13, false prophets “smear with whitewash” (13:10), promising peace to a people

steeped in idolatry, while Chapter 14's **elders** are rebuked for "idols in their heart" (14:3), refusing God's call to repent. Chapters 15 and 16 portray Judah as a useless vine (15:2) and an **adulterous bride** (16:15), betraying God with idols and foreign alliances. Chapter 17's parable of **two eagles** warns of rebellion's consequences (17:15), leading to Chapter 18's covenant lawsuit, where God declares, "**The soul who sins shall die**" (18:4), yet pleads, "**turn and live**" (18:32). This refusal to hear "bad news" echoes our own temptation to avoid God's justice, seeking only what soothes us.

Ezekiel's role is to embody God's message, becoming a "sign" to Judah (12:6) through actions like trembling over his meal (12:18). His words carry divine urgency, confronting the people who want comfort without conviction. The emotional weight—anger at false prophets (13:8), sorrow in allegories of betrayal (16:15), hope in repentance (18:32)—reveals God's heart, **longing for His people to return**. The repetition of "**they shall know that I am the Lord**" (12:15, 16) is both a judgment and a call to recognize God's authority.

This reading, covering chapters 12 through 18, forms the first half of Ezekiel's oracles of judgment, culminating in the call to "**turn and live**" (18:32). In our next reading in a

few weeks, we'll read chapters 19 through 24, where judgment intensifies, leading to Jerusalem's fall.

As we read these chapters, I challenge you to **examine your own hearts**: How will you react to Ezekiel's message? Do we, like Judah, turn from hard truths, preferring “**smooth things**” (**Isaiah 30:10**)? Ezekiel's message is clear: only by facing our sin can we heed God's mercy.

As we listen, **resist the urge** to “**tickle our ears**” with false peace, as Judah did (**13:10**). Instead, hear God's full word—His **justice** against sin, His **grief** over rebellion, and His **invitation** to repentance. The good news only makes sense with the backdrop of the bad. It is not ours to choose which parts of the Bible we will read and which parts we will cross out. Only its totality can give us the fullness of the God we have come to worship today.

Finally, I want you to think of **a few things related to Christ** as we listen. First, the arc from judgment (“**know that I am the Lord,**” **12:15**) to repentance (“**turn and live,**” **18:32**) foreshadows Christ's coming mission. Jesus fulfills God's judgment by bearing sin's penalty on the cross and offers repentance through His resurrection. Listen to Ezekiel's progression as pointing to Christ, who turns judgment into salvation for those who repent, unlike Judah's refusal.

Second, Ezekiel's role as a “[sign](#),” trembling with God's grief, prefigures Christ, the ultimate sign ([Luke 2:34](#)), who bore God's wrath in Gethsemane's agony ([Luke 22:44](#)) and on the cross ([Matthew 27:46](#)). Look at Ezekiel, the son of man's burden, as a shadow of Christ's suffering for our sins, calling us to respond to His sacrifice rather than resist like Judah.

Third, the imagery of a useless [vine](#) and adulterous [bride](#) each point to Christ, the true vine ([John 15:1](#)) who fulfills the covenant Judah broke. His exile to the cross and redemption of the unfaithful bride (Ephesians 5:25–27) transform these images for you his disciples, his church, his new covenant bride.

Fourth, think about how catch phrases like “[know that I am the Lord](#)” ([12:15](#)) and “[idols in their heart](#)” ([14:3](#)), point you to Christ, who reveals God's lordship ([John 14:9](#)) and cleanses idolatrous hearts ([1Jn 1:7](#)). Reflect on personal [idols](#) and how trusting Christ's atonement is the opposite of Judah's preference not hearing God's word.

Finally, [the lawsuits](#) in Chs. 14 and 18 find their resolution in Christ, who faces God's judgment ([Rom 3:25](#)) and offers repentance. Hear God's case as fulfilled in Christ's

cross, calling us to repent and find mercy, rather than false peace (13:10).

May these chapters awaken us to our own idols, stir us to turn back to God, and draw us to the hope of His mercy, trusting the Lord who speaks through His prophet.

Ezekiel 12-18

12 The word of the Lord came to me: “Son of man, you dwell in the midst of a rebellious house, who have eyes to see, but see not, who have ears to hear, but hear not, for they are a rebellious house. As for you, son of man, prepare for yourself an exile’s baggage, and go into exile by day in their sight. You shall go like an exile from your place to another place in their sight. Perhaps they will understand, though they are a rebellious house. You shall bring out your baggage by day in their sight, as baggage for exile, and you shall go out yourself at evening in their sight, as those do who must go into exile. In their sight dig through the wall, and bring your baggage out through it. In their sight you shall lift the baggage upon your shoulder and carry it out at dusk. You shall cover your face that you may not see the land, for I have made you a sign for the house of Israel.”

And I did as I was commanded. I brought out my baggage by day, as baggage for exile, and in the evening I dug through the wall with my own hands. I brought out my baggage at dusk, carrying it on my shoulder in their sight.

In the morning the word of the Lord came to me: “Son of man, has not the house of Israel, the rebellious house, said to you, ‘What are you doing?’ Say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God: This oracle concerns the prince in Jerusalem and all the house of Israel who are in it.’ Say, ‘I am a sign for you: as I have done, so shall it be done to them. They shall go into exile, into captivity.’ And the prince who is among them shall lift his baggage upon his shoulder at dusk, and shall go out. They shall dig through the wall to bring him out through it. He shall cover his face, that he may not see the land with his eyes. And I will spread my net over him, and he shall be taken in my snare. And I will bring him to Babylon, the land of the Chaldeans, yet he shall not see it, and he shall die there. And I will scatter toward every wind all who are around him, his helpers and all his troops, and I will unsheathe the sword after them. And they shall know that I am the Lord, when I disperse them among the nations and scatter them among the countries. But I will let a few of them escape from the sword, from famine and pestilence, that they may declare all their abominations among the nations where they go, and may know that I am the Lord.”

And the word of the Lord came to me: “Son of man, eat your bread with quaking, and drink water with trembling and with anxiety. And say to the people of the land, Thus says the Lord God concerning the inhabitants of Jerusalem in the land of Israel: They shall eat their bread with anxiety, and drink water in dismay. In this way her land will be stripped of all it contains, on account of the violence of all those who dwell in it. And the inhabited cities shall be laid waste, and the land shall become a desolation; and you shall know that I am the Lord.”

And the word of the Lord came to me: “Son of man, what is this proverb that you have about the land of Israel, saying, ‘The days grow long, and every vision comes to nothing’? Tell them therefore, ‘Thus says the Lord God: I will put an end to this proverb, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel.’ But say to them, The days are near, and the fulfillment of every vision. For there shall be no more any false vision or flattering divination within the house of Israel. For I am the Lord; I will speak the word that I will speak, and it will be performed. It will no longer be delayed, but in your days, O rebellious house, I will speak the word and perform it, declares the Lord God.”

And the word of the Lord came to me: “Son of man, behold, they of the house of Israel say, ‘The vision that he sees is for many days from now, and he prophesies of times far off.’ Therefore say to them, Thus says the Lord God: None

of my words will be delayed any longer, but the word that I speak will be performed, declares the Lord God.”

13 The word of the Lord came to me: “Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel, who are prophesying, and say to those who prophesy from their own hearts: ‘Hear the word of the Lord!’ Thus says the Lord God, Woe to the foolish prophets who follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing! Your prophets have been like jackals among ruins, O Israel. You have not gone up into the breaches, or built up a wall for the house of Israel, that it might stand in battle in the day of the Lord. They have seen false visions and lying divinations. They say, ‘Declares the Lord,’ when the Lord has not sent them, and yet they expect him to fulfill their word. Have you not seen a false vision and uttered a lying divination, whenever you have said, ‘Declares the Lord,’ although I have not spoken?”

Therefore thus says the Lord God: “Because you have uttered falsehood and seen lying visions, therefore behold, I am against you, declares the Lord God. My hand will be against the prophets who see false visions and who give lying divinations. They shall not be in the council of my people, nor be enrolled in the register of the house of Israel, nor shall they enter the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord God. Precisely because they have misled my people, saying, ‘Peace,’ when there is no peace, and because,

when the people build a wall, these prophets smear it with whitewash, say to those who smear it with whitewash that it shall fall! There will be a deluge of rain, and you, O great hailstones, will fall, and a stormy wind break out. And when the wall falls, will it not be said to you, ‘Where is the coating with which you smeared it?’ Therefore thus says the Lord God: I will make a stormy wind break out in my wrath, and there shall be a deluge of rain in my anger, and great hailstones in wrath to make a full end. And I will break down the wall that you have smeared with whitewash, and bring it down to the ground, so that its foundation will be laid bare. When it falls, you shall perish in the midst of it, and you shall know that I am the Lord. Thus will I spend my wrath upon the wall and upon those who have smeared it with whitewash, and I will say to you, The wall is no more, nor those who smeared it, the prophets of Israel who prophesied concerning Jerusalem and saw visions of peace for her, when there was no peace, declares the Lord God.

“And you, son of man, set your face against the daughters of your people, who prophesy out of their own hearts. Prophesy against them and say, Thus says the Lord God: Woe to the women who sew magic bands upon all wrists, and make veils for the heads of persons of every stature, in the hunt for souls! Will you hunt down souls belonging to my people and keep your own souls alive? You have profaned me among my people for handfuls of barley and for

pieces of bread, putting to death souls who should not die and keeping alive souls who should not live, by your lying to my people, who listen to lies.

“Therefore thus says the Lord God: Behold, I am against your magic bands with which you hunt the souls like birds, and I will tear them from your arms, and I will let the souls whom you hunt go free, the souls like birds. Your veils also I will tear off and deliver my people out of your hand, and they shall be no more in your hand as prey, and you shall know that I am the Lord. Because you have disheartened the righteous falsely, although I have not grieved him, and you have encouraged the wicked, that he should not turn from his evil way to save his life, therefore you shall no more see false visions nor practice divination. I will deliver my people out of your hand. And you shall know that I am the Lord.”

14 Then certain of the elders of Israel came to me and sat before me. And the word of the Lord came to me: “Son of man, these men have taken their idols into their hearts, and set the stumbling block of their iniquity before their faces. Should I indeed let myself be consulted by them? Therefore speak to them and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Any one of the house of Israel who takes his idols into his heart and sets the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and yet comes to the prophet, I the Lord will answer him as he comes with the multitude of his idols, that I may

lay hold of the hearts of the house of Israel, who are all estranged from me through their idols.

“Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: Repent and turn away from your idols, and turn away your faces from all your abominations. For any one of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who sojourn in Israel, who separates himself from me, taking his idols into his heart and putting the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and yet comes to a prophet to consult me through him, I the Lord will answer him myself. And I will set my face against that man; I will make him a sign and a byword and cut him off from the midst of my people, and you shall know that I am the Lord. And if the prophet is deceived and speaks a word, I, the Lord, have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand against him and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel. And they shall bear their punishment—the punishment of the prophet and the punishment of the inquirer shall be alike—that the house of Israel may no more go astray from me, nor defile themselves anymore with all their transgressions, but that they may be my people and I may be their God, declares the Lord God.”

And the word of the Lord came to me: “Son of man, when a land sins against me by acting faithlessly, and I stretch out my hand against it and break its supply of bread and send famine upon it, and cut off from it man and beast, even if

these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness, declares the Lord God.

“If I cause wild beasts to pass through the land, and they ravage it, and it be made desolate, so that no one may pass through because of the beasts, even if these three men were in it, as I live, declares the Lord God, they would deliver neither sons nor daughters. They alone would be delivered, but the land would be desolate.

“Or if I bring a sword upon that land and say, Let a sword pass through the land, and I cut off from it man and beast, though these three men were in it, as I live, declares the Lord God, they would deliver neither sons nor daughters, but they alone would be delivered.

“Or if I send a pestilence into that land and pour out my wrath upon it with blood, to cut off from it man and beast, even if Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, as I live, declares the Lord God, they would deliver neither son nor daughter. They would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness.

“For thus says the Lord God: How much more when I send upon Jerusalem my four disastrous acts of judgment, sword, famine, wild beasts, and pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast! But behold, some survivors will be left in it, sons and daughters who will be brought out; behold, when they come out to you, and you see their ways and their

deeds, you will be consoled for the disaster that I have brought upon Jerusalem, for all that I have brought upon it. They will console you, when you see their ways and their deeds, and you shall know that I have not done without cause all that I have done in it, declares the Lord God.”

15 And the word of the Lord came to me: “Son of man, how does the wood of the vine surpass any wood, the vine branch that is among the trees of the forest? Is wood taken from it to make anything? Do people take a peg from it to hang any vessel on it? Behold, it is given to the fire for fuel. When the fire has consumed both ends of it, and the middle of it is charred, is it useful for anything? Behold, when it was whole, it was used for nothing. How much less, when the fire has consumed it and it is charred, can it ever be used for anything! Therefore thus says the Lord God: Like the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so have I given up the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And I will set my face against them. Though they escape from the fire, the fire shall yet consume them, and you will know that I am the Lord, when I set my face against them. And I will make the land desolate, because they have acted faithlessly, declares the Lord God.”

16 Again the word of the Lord came to me: “Son of man, make known to Jerusalem her abominations, and say, Thus says the Lord God to Jerusalem: Your origin and your birth are of the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite. And as for your birth, on the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to cleanse you, nor rubbed with salt, nor wrapped in swaddling cloths. No eye pitied you, to do any of these things to you out of compassion for you, but you were cast out on the open field, for you were abhorred, on the day that you were born.

“And when I passed by you and saw you wallowing in your blood, I said to you in your blood, ‘Live!’ I said to you in your blood, ‘Live!’ I made you flourish like a plant of the field. And you grew up and became tall and arrived at full adornment. Your breasts were formed, and your hair had grown; yet you were naked and bare.

“When I passed by you again and saw you, behold, you were at the age for love, and I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness; I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord God, and you became mine. Then I bathed you with water and washed off your blood from you and anointed you with oil. I clothed you also with embroidered cloth and shod you with fine leather. I wrapped you in fine linen and covered you with silk. And I adorned you with ornaments

and put bracelets on your wrists and a chain on your neck. And I put a ring on your nose and earrings in your ears and a beautiful crown on your head. Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen and silk and embroidered cloth. You ate fine flour and honey and oil. You grew exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty. And your renown went forth among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through the splendor that I had bestowed on you, declares the Lord God.

“But you trusted in your beauty and played the whore because of your renown and lavished your whorings on any passerby; your beauty became his. You took some of your garments and made for yourself colorful shrines, and on them played the whore. The like has never been, nor ever shall be. You also took your beautiful jewels of my gold and of my silver, which I had given you, and made for yourself images of men, and with them played the whore. And you took your embroidered garments to cover them, and set my oil and my incense before them. Also my bread that I gave you—I fed you with fine flour and oil and honey—you set before them for a pleasing aroma; and so it was, declares the Lord God. And you took your sons and your daughters, whom you had borne to me, and these you sacrificed to them to be devoured. Were your whorings so small a matter that you slaughtered my children and delivered them up as an offering by fire to them? And in all your abominations

and your whorings you did not remember the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare, wallowing in your blood.

“And after all your wickedness (woe, woe to you! declares the Lord God), you built yourself a vaulted chamber and made yourself a lofty place in every square. At the head of every street you built your lofty place and made your beauty an abomination, offering yourself to any passerby and multiplying your whoring. You also played the whore with the Egyptians, your lustful neighbors, multiplying your whoring, to provoke me to anger. Behold, therefore, I stretched out my hand against you and diminished your allotted portion and delivered you to the greed of your enemies, the daughters of the Philistines, who were ashamed of your lewd behavior. You played the whore also with the Assyrians, because you were not satisfied; yes, you played the whore with them, and still you were not satisfied. You multiplied your whoring also with the trading land of Chaldea, and even with this you were not satisfied.

“How sick is your heart, declares the Lord God, because you did all these things, the deeds of a brazen prostitute, building your vaulted chamber at the head of every street, and making your lofty place in every square. Yet you were not like a prostitute, because you scorned payment. Adulterous wife, who receives strangers instead of her husband! Men give gifts to all prostitutes, but you gave your gifts to

all your lovers, bribing them to come to you from every side with your whorings. So you were different from other women in your whorings. No one solicited you to play the whore, and you gave payment, while no payment was given to you; therefore you were different.

“Therefore, O prostitute, hear the word of the Lord: Thus says the Lord God, Because your lust was poured out and your nakedness uncovered in your whorings with your lovers, and with all your abominable idols, and because of the blood of your children that you gave to them, therefore, behold, I will gather all your lovers with whom you took pleasure, all those you loved and all those you hated. I will gather them against you from every side and will uncover your nakedness to them, that they may see all your nakedness. And I will judge you as women who commit adultery and shed blood are judged, and bring upon you the blood of wrath and jealousy. And I will give you into their hands, and they shall throw down your vaulted chamber and break down your lofty places. They shall strip you of your clothes and take your beautiful jewels and leave you naked and bare. They shall bring up a crowd against you, and they shall stone you and cut you to pieces with their swords. And they shall burn your houses and execute judgments upon you in the sight of many women. I will make you stop playing the whore, and you shall also give payment no more. So will I satisfy my wrath on you, and my jealousy shall depart from

you. I will be calm and will no more be angry. Because you have not remembered the days of your youth, but have enraged me with all these things, therefore, behold, I have returned your deeds upon your head, declares the Lord God. Have you not committed lewdness in addition to all your abominations?

“Behold, everyone who uses proverbs will use this proverb about you: ‘Like mother, like daughter.’ You are the daughter of your mother, who loathed her husband and her children; and you are the sister of your sisters, who loathed their husbands and their children. Your mother was a Hittite and your father an Amorite. And your elder sister is Samaria, who lived with her daughters to the north of you; and your younger sister, who lived to the south of you, is Sodom with her daughters. Not only did you walk in their ways and do according to their abominations; within a very little time you were more corrupt than they in all your ways. As I live, declares the Lord God, your sister Sodom and her daughters have not done as you and your daughters have done. Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty and did an abomination before me. So I removed them, when I saw it. Samaria has not committed half your sins. You have committed more abominations than they,

and have made your sisters appear righteous by all the abominations that you have committed. Bear your disgrace, you also, for you have intervened on behalf of your sisters. Because of your sins in which you acted more abominably than they, they are more in the right than you. So be ashamed, you also, and bear your disgrace, for you have made your sisters appear righteous.

“I will restore their fortunes, both the fortunes of Sodom and her daughters, and the fortunes of Samaria and her daughters, and I will restore your own fortunes in their midst, that you may bear your disgrace and be ashamed of all that you have done, becoming a consolation to them. As for your sisters, Sodom and her daughters shall return to their former state, and Samaria and her daughters shall return to their former state, and you and your daughters shall return to your former state. Was not your sister Sodom a byword in your mouth in the day of your pride, before your wickedness was uncovered? Now you have become an object of reproach for the daughters of Syria and all those around her, and for the daughters of the Philistines, those all around who despise you. You bear the penalty of your lewdness and your abominations, declares the Lord.

“For thus says the Lord God: I will deal with you as you have done, you who have despised the oath in breaking the covenant, yet I will remember my covenant with you in the

days of your youth, and I will establish for you an everlasting covenant. Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed when you take your sisters, both your elder and your younger, and I give them to you as daughters, but not on account of the covenant with you. I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the Lord, that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame, when I atone for you for all that you have done, declares the Lord God.”

17 The word of the Lord came to me: “Son of man, propound a riddle, and speak a parable to the house of Israel; say, Thus says the Lord God: A great eagle with great wings and long pinions, rich in plumage of many colors, came to Lebanon and took the top of the cedar. He broke off the topmost of its young twigs and carried it to a land of trade and set it in a city of merchants. Then he took of the seed of the land and planted it in fertile soil. He placed it beside abundant waters. He set it like a willow twig, and it sprouted and became a low spreading vine, and its branches turned toward him, and its roots remained where it stood. So it became a vine and produced branches and put out boughs.

“And there was another great eagle with great wings and much plumage, and behold, this vine bent its roots toward him and shot forth its branches toward him from the bed

where it was planted, that he might water it. It had been planted on good soil by abundant waters, that it might produce branches and bear fruit and become a noble vine.

“Say, Thus says the Lord God: Will it thrive? Will he not pull up its roots and cut off its fruit, so that it withers, so that all its fresh sprouting leaves wither? It will not take a strong arm or many people to pull it from its roots. Behold, it is planted; will it thrive? Will it not utterly wither when the east wind strikes it—wither away on the bed where it sprouted?”

Then the word of the Lord came to me: “Say now to the rebellious house, Do you not know what these things mean? Tell them, behold, the king of Babylon came to Jerusalem, and took her king and her princes and brought them to him to Babylon. And he took one of the royal offspring and made a covenant with him, putting him under oath (the chief men of the land he had taken away), that the kingdom might be humble and not lift itself up, and keep his covenant that it might stand. But he rebelled against him by sending his ambassadors to Egypt, that they might give him horses and a large army. Will he thrive? Can one escape who does such things? Can he break the covenant and yet escape?

“As I live, declares the Lord God, surely in the place where the king dwells who made him king, whose oath he despised, and whose covenant with him he broke, in Babylon he shall die. Pharaoh with his mighty army and great

company will not help him in war, when mounds are cast up and siege walls built to cut off many lives. He despised the oath in breaking the covenant, and behold, he gave his hand and did all these things; he shall not escape. Therefore thus says the Lord God: As I live, surely it is my oath that he despised, and my covenant that he broke. I will return it upon his head. I will spread my net over him, and he shall be taken in my snare, and I will bring him to Babylon and enter into judgment with him there for the treachery he has committed against me. And all the pick of his troops shall fall by the sword, and the survivors shall be scattered to every wind, and you shall know that I am the Lord; I have spoken.”

Thus says the Lord God: “I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and will set it out. I will break off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. On the mountain height of Israel will I plant it, that it may bear branches and produce fruit and become a noble cedar. And under it will dwell every kind of bird; in the shade of its branches birds of every sort will nest. And all the trees of the field shall know that I am the Lord; I bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish. I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it.”

18 The word of the Lord came to me: “What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge’? As I live, declares the Lord God, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die.

“If a man is righteous and does what is just and right—if he does not eat upon the mountains or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, does not defile his neighbor’s wife or approach a woman in her time of menstrual impurity, does not oppress anyone, but restores to the debtor his pledge, commits no robbery, gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment, does not lend at interest or take any profit, withholds his hand from injustice, executes true justice between man and man, walks in my statutes, and keeps my rules by acting faithfully—he is righteous; he shall surely live, declares the Lord God.

“If he fathers a son who is violent, a shedder of blood, who does any of these things (though he himself did none of these things), who even eats upon the mountains, defiles his neighbor’s wife, oppresses the poor and needy, commits robbery, does not restore the pledge, lifts up his eyes to the idols, commits abomination, lends at interest, and takes profit; shall he then live? He shall not live. He has done all

these abominations; he shall surely die; his blood shall be upon himself.

“Now suppose this man fathers a son who sees all the sins that his father has done; he sees, and does not do likewise: he does not eat upon the mountains or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, does not defile his neighbor’s wife, does not oppress anyone, exacts no pledge, commits no robbery, but gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment, withholds his hand from iniquity, takes no interest or profit, obeys my rules, and walks in my statutes; he shall not die for his father’s iniquity; he shall surely live. As for his father, because he practiced extortion, robbed his brother, and did what is not good among his people, behold, he shall die for his iniquity.

“Yet you say, ‘Why should not the son suffer for the iniquity of the father?’ When the son has done what is just and right, and has been careful to observe all my statutes, he shall surely live. The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.

“But if a wicked person turns away from all his sins that he has committed and keeps all my statutes and does what is just and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of

the transgressions that he has committed shall be remembered against him; for the righteousness that he has done he shall live. Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord God, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live? But when a righteous person turns away from his righteousness and does injustice and does the same abominations that the wicked person does, shall he live? None of the righteous deeds that he has done shall be remembered; for the treachery of which he is guilty and the sin he has committed, for them he shall die.

“Yet you say, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way not just? Is it not your ways that are not just? When a righteous person turns away from his righteousness and does injustice, he shall die for it; for the injustice that he has done he shall die. Again, when a wicked person turns away from the wickedness he has committed and does what is just and right, he shall save his life. Because he considered and turned away from all the transgressions that he had committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die. Yet the house of Israel says, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ O house of Israel, are my ways not just? Is it not your ways that are not just?

“Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, declares the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have

committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord God; so turn, and live.”